

THEATRE

A DEMONSTRATION OF CRISIS

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We are living today in an age of Science and advanced technology. Indeed so superior has been the advance of our scientific knowledge and so vast the field of scientific enquiry that, from observing and controlling the forces of nature upon this terrestrial globe we have now ventured beyond, to the cosmic spaces of our universe and no doubt shall, in the near future visit, perhaps even inhabit, other spheres in outer space.

The enquiries of science, imply an absorbing interest in the external world. The adventures of the mind that led to the conquest of space arose first in the imagination. From the fatal flight of Icarus in the Greek myth, to the experimental attempts of Da Vinci in the Renaissance, down to the successful flight of the Wright brothers in 1913 and to the latest landings of rockets on the moon, one can trace an unbroken line of enquiry and experiment, crowned by fantastic success. But whether such enquiry concerns the business of "flying in the air", or splitting the atom, or curing a disease, the imagination that impels and directs it is an adventure of the intellect; of man's objective faculties of reason; of deduction; of diligent research.

As such, imagination that leads to scientific enquiry is "impersonal" imagination — it does not touch upon the heart of man, nor involve his entire being. It is no wonder then, that there has grown up what is almost a truism about our age — our Age of Science — namely, that our knowledge has outstripped our understanding and our adjustment. Science and its fearful discoveries have almost taken over control of man's life, instead of helping him to control it, which was his whole purpose and original intention.

Man requires urgently now, to understand himself, not with the cold and objective impersonal imagination of the intellect, but through the impact and direct experience of his "total being". Theatre creates for us this "direct experience".

You may ask why, of all the arts, should the dramatic arts be thus distinguished for this purpose.

Theatre has its beginnings in the grass roots of civilization. In the pulsing beat of a drum round a fire at a tribal ritual; in the weird chant of the witch-doctor in his fantastic garb and mask; in the relating of myths and epics down the ages. In all these dim memories of our past we can see the first off-shoots of the dramatic arts. Nurtured in such soil — of ritual, myth and epic — it is no wonder that the theatrical experience involves our total being and is apprehended at every level of our consciousness — with our mind, with the emotions, in the blood and in the "tribal memory", in the unconscious but powerful motivating forces of our unknown nature.

Whether it is Gandhari who through the death of her sons knows the humiliation and bitterness of defeat, or Sophocles' Oedipus confronted by his double guilt, or Shakespeare's Lear stripped down to the "bare forked animal", or Ibsen's Nora, literally and metaphorically banging the door upon a known world to venture forth into the unknown— drama, at its best, is a "demonstration of crisis" in the life of man.

Drama is not scientific enquiry, nor philosophic speculation, nor psychological analysis, nor historical study, although it may include all these. It is more; it is ultimately, a demonstration of experience; as such it involves and implicates us in that experience. It does not set out to educate or entertain, to inform or instruct, although again it may achieve any or all these purposes. Its whole purpose is to involve us in a creative experience. It is out of such experience that we can better apprehend the nature of man. The effects of such apprehension can be profound.

This is then the true significance of our presence at this Convocation. You young men and women, who today have received awards and diplomas are the fortunate pioneers of theatre in our country. On you depends the future of the Indian theatre movement and in you is placed a trust; a heavy responsibility.

It is your work in your chosen profession that will give a direction to theatre in India. The foundations have been laid, but your work is just beginning. Do not ask yourself, "How can the theatre serve me?"

If you will remind yourselves of the vital role that theatre should play in demonstrating the human predicament and helping us all to understand ourselves, your attitude will of necessity be one of humility and determination. Dedication in any work is necessary; in the field of art it is essential. Without a sense of dedication — of considering first the interests of this exacting art, and the manner in which it can best uplift the nation — nothing of a lasting nature, of a high standard, can be achieved.

The National School of Drama has a unique opportunity. In a country rich in traditional and folk art, in song, music, dance, it can draw on an inexhaustible source of inspiration — material that can be given new dimensions and meaning. For not only does the theatre imply an amalgam of many art-forms — such as music, song, dance, scenic and costume design, sculpture and painting — it gives a creative and new meaning to these arts. Integrated and fused in the production of a play, there emerges a fresh vision. In its contemporary nature, too, theatre appeals to an audience, here and now. To do this effectively it must be truly "modern" in approach. The play may be a classic or an ancient piece but if it is done by an Indian theatre company in 1964, it must have a meaning for its contemporary audience. It must reach across with an immediate impact.

The future of the theatre in our country is in the hands of the younger generation. It is the proud privilege of the graduates of the National School of Drama, to be in the vanguard of a movement to re-vitalise this noblest of the arts, and to forge in the smithy of your souls the re-awakened conscience of your race.

Dr. Zakir Husain, Vice-President of India, is known for his distinguished scholarship and as an educationist. He has been Vice-Chancellor of various Universities. He has published both original works as well as translations from the Persian. He takes an active interest in the promotion of the arts in his present position and has done much to foster and encourage them in all parts of the country.